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Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 1641st meeting*
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 30 October 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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* No summary records were issued for the 1639th and 1640th meetings.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Eighth periodic report of Mauritius (CEDAW/C/MUS/8 and CEDAW/C/MUS/QPR/8)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mauritius took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that her Government had appreciated the opportunity to submit its eighth periodic report (CEDAW/C/MUS/8) using the simplified reporting procedure, which had helped reduce the reporting burden for Mauritius, a small island developing State with limited resources. In the period since its previous review, her country had made significant progress towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, including by ratifying the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol). Women's representation in decision-making roles in Government had improved, most notably through the election of the country's first woman President in 2014, and the number of women standing in local elections had increased. Moreover, the Constitution had been amended to establish a minimum gender quota for candidates in elections to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. Electoral reforms were envisaged to improve the gender balance in the National Assembly, where women were still underrepresented.

3. Several pieces of legislation relating to women's human rights had been enacted or amended. For example, the National Women's Council Act of 2016 had been adopted to improve the functioning of the National Women's Council and, thus, aid in the promotion of women's empowerment and gender equality, and the Employment Rights Act had been revised to increase maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks and to incorporate the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Other achievements during the reporting period included the publication of the country's first African Gender and Development Index report, which had revealed the significant strides that had been made in terms of improving gender equality and women's empowerment, and the realization of gender parity in primary education enrolment rates.

4. Notwithstanding the progress made, structural barriers to the attainment of gender equality remained. As a result, the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming had been established to facilitate cooperation between the gender focal points of each ministry and the National Gender Policy Framework was being amended to align it more closely with the relevant goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Once revised, the Framework would serve as an effective tool for enabling ministries to revise their sector-specific gender policies and remove obstacles to women's equality. In addition, budget allocations for gender equality had been established, which, for the current financial year, covered the introduction of a bill on gender equality, the provision of training on gender issues for government officials and the establishment of a work-at-home scheme aimed at increasing productivity and extending opportunities beyond the traditional workplace. The Government was also working with the European Union to obtain technical assistance and capacity-building in relation to gender mainstreaming and to monitor progress in, among other areas, combating violence against women and girls and eliminating all forms of trafficking of girls in Mauritius.

5. Various measures had been taken to combat gender-based violence against women in Mauritius and in the islands of Rodrigues and Agalega. For instance, an innovative mobile application had been launched in order to enable women to alert the authorities of family welfare issues and thus gain the necessary protection they needed. Similarly, a citizen support website had been created to allow members of the public to report gender-based violence, among other matters. An integrated support centre was also being put in place to provide 24-hour comprehensive support and counselling for victims of violence. In that connection, while the criminalization of marital rape was still under consideration, the definition of domestic violence contained in the Protection from Domestic Violence Act had been expanded to include forced sexual conduct. Awareness-raising campaigns were

carried out on diverse topics, such as gender equality, women's empowerment and family welfare, and a mobile service conducted outreach in remote areas. As regards tackling gender stereotypes, boys were encouraged to take non-traditional subjects in school and gender networks had been established to inculcate the concept of gender equality in young persons.

6. In other areas, measures had been taken to ensure that women on the islands of Rodrigues and Agalega had access to adequate health-care services, including by transferring patients requiring specialist treatment to Mauritius. Awareness-raising campaigns and preventive measures were being implemented to tackle the teenage pregnancy rate and encourage pregnant girls and new mothers to complete their education. Efforts to eradicate extreme poverty had led to a re-evaluation of the poverty threshold, which was now 40 per cent higher than the figure set by the World Bank, and the introduction of a subsistence allowance aimed at lifting persons out of poverty. Women's economic empowerment was being promoted through, among other initiatives, a 10-year master plan for small and medium-sized enterprises, which included measures aimed at fostering women's entrepreneurial activities, and the provision of technical training to young people. In August 2018, a ministerial conference on the link between women's economic empowerment and sustainable development had been held in Mauritius and attended by delegates from 19 member States of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

7. Regarding trafficking in persons, Mauritius had been removed from the tier 2 watch list maintained by the United States Department of State in 2015. Various measures had been taken to combat trafficking, including informing migrant workers of their rights and raising awareness of trafficking for the purposes of forced labour and sexual exploitation. In 2017, the Government had established a new ministry with responsibility for dealing with human rights issues in a more comprehensive manner. A national mechanism for reporting and follow-up had also been set up to: promote consultation between government ministries and civil society, which included representatives of the lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex community; ensure that the Government met its human-rights-related obligations, including the submission of periodic reports; and facilitate cooperation between ministries in implementing recommendations made by the human rights treaty bodies. Lastly, the Government was committed to bringing meaningful change to Mauritius and looked forward to receiving the recommendations and support of the Committee to help it in achieving that goal.

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8. **Ms. Schulz** said she was concerned that several important issues that had been raised repeatedly by the Committee during previous reviews of the State party's implementation of the Convention had still not been addressed. She therefore wished to know whether the bill on gender equality included provision for the Convention to be fully transposed into domestic law, whether the State party intended to align the definition of discrimination in the Constitution with article 1 of the Convention and whether the Constitution was to be amended to extend the prohibition of discrimination to the public sector. She would be interested to know whether a timeline had been set for repealing the exemption to the prohibition of discrimination contained in section 16 (4) (c) of the Constitution, which concerned personal status issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance rights. The Committee was very concerned that little progress had been made in that regard since the State party's accession to the Convention in 1984.

9. She wondered whether there were plans to align the Constitution with more recent legislation, such as the Equal Opportunities Act, in order to expand the prohibited grounds for discrimination to cover, among others, age, marital status and sexual orientation, and whether the State party intended to eliminate constitutional provisions that protected discriminatory laws against non-Mauritians, which could disproportionately affect women migrant workers. She welcomed the establishment of a national mechanism for reporting and follow-up and asked whether it was responsible for monitoring the implementation of human rights legislation. Lastly, she wondered whether the State party collected data disaggregated by sex or gender and, if so, whether such information could be provided so

as to enable the Committee to assess the situation of women in the State party and, in particular, in Rodrigues and the other islands.

10. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the Government was taking steps to address the lack of gender-disaggregated data, including by seeking technical assistance and strengthening national capacities to collect, analyse and disseminate statistical data. For instance, workshops and train-the-trainer sessions had been held for relevant stakeholders and an action plan had been devised with the aim of creating a new system for gathering data on violence against women and children. She trusted that the Government would soon have the statistics necessary to improve the situation of women in Mauritius. Lastly, it was envisaged that the national mechanism for reporting and follow-up would monitor the application of legislation and the implementation of recommendations of the treaty bodies.

11. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that, since the bill on gender equality was still being drafted, the suggestion to include provisions aimed at ensuring the Convention was incorporated into national law would certainly be considered. There were no plans at the present time to expand the definition of discrimination in the Constitution, since the prohibited grounds of discrimination were well established in legislation such as the Equal Opportunities Act. Indeed, complaints of discrimination relating to the private sector could be brought under that Act. With respect to article 16 (4) (c) of the Constitution, which concerned personal status issues such as marriage and divorce, the Government had previously established a commission to assess the impact on women of the Muslim personal status laws. However, the different schools of Islamic thought had not reached a consensus on what was a sensitive issue. Further study and consultation were therefore required.

12. It was not possible to provide a time frame for revision of the Constitution. Issues such as the removal of the provisions under section 16 (4) that the Committee considered discriminatory were very sensitive. However, her Government would take account of the Committee's comments in that regard. There were no plans as yet to incorporate the grounds for discrimination set forth in legislation such as the Equal Opportunities Act and the Equal Employment Act into the Constitution; the legislation was deemed to address those forms of discrimination adequately.

13. The national mechanism for reporting and follow-up met once a month. It covered not only the State's obligations to the human rights treaty bodies but also dealt with the Human Rights Council universal periodic review. It also monitored progress achieved under the National Human Rights Action Plan.

14. **Ms. Schulz** pointed out that the fact that section 16 of the Constitution did not cover the private sector meant that victims of discrimination in that sector had no constitutional redress. With regard to access to justice, she said that, although the report mentioned that training in the Convention was provided to legal professionals, she could see no reference to further training or capacity-building to increase gender awareness within the justice system generally.

15. The Committee was concerned about the high rate of women in pretrial detention. Did the State party plan to step up its use of alternative, non-custodial measures for women, particularly those accused of non-violent offences? She wondered whether there were any measures in place to speed up the processing of such cases in order to cut the length of pretrial detention.

16. With regard to access to justice, she said that she would be interested to know whether, in the event that a conciliation procedure in the Equal Opportunities Commission was unsuccessful and the Commission itself did not refer the matter to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal, a complainant was able to apply to the Tribunal or some other court in her own right. She noted that the latest report of the Commission available on its website dated from 2014. She would appreciate information on the Commission's activities in respect of discrimination against women in the intervening period.

17. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari**, referring to the lack of consensus in the Muslim community in respect of the impact on women of the Muslim Personal Law, as promulgated in accordance with section 16 (4) of the Constitution, asked by what means

the Government had attempted to reach consensus. Who had been consulted and had women, particularly women religious leaders, been involved in the process?

18. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius), replying to a question from **Ms. Chalal**, said that her delegation would investigate why the National Human Rights Commission report had not been received by the Committee.

19. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that it was possible that the lack of any reference to the Convention in Equal Opportunities Commission decisions reflected a lack of knowledge on Commission members' part. The delegation would take note of that point and ensure proper dissemination of the Convention. In general, however, the legal profession and the judiciary received training on human rights issues and the human rights treaty bodies. Indeed, in February 2018, Committee member Ms. Narain had contributed to training in the Convention and further refresher courses in the Convention were planned.

20. Pretrial detention was one of the issues addressed in the Police and Criminal Justice Bill, which was now under consideration in the Attorney General's Office following the period of consultation. Individuals could not apply directly to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal; where conciliation failed, it was for the Equal Opportunities Commission to make a referral subject to the complainant's consent. She would look into the missing Commission reports referred to by Ms. Schulz and ensure that they were published in timely fashion.

21. Women had been involved in the review of the Muslim Personal Law; indeed, the Muslim Family Council had been chaired by a female senior attorney since November 2016. The Commission of Muslim Jurists, in existence from 1981 to 1987, had, in the course of its deliberations, sought expert advice from a consultant from Saudi Arabia. However, the Commission had been dissolved before the consultant's report had been completed.

22. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius), replying to a question from **Ms. Chalal**, said that she would provide written information concerning the funding of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

23. **Ms. Schulz** said that she was still not clear about whether, if the Equal Opportunities Commission did not wish to refer a case to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal, the woman taking the proceedings could herself apply to the Tribunal. If not, could she apply to some other court to assert her rights?

24. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that there were numerous avenues for a claimant wishing to pursue a case further other than the Equal Opportunities Commission: she could, for example, seek redress under section 17 of the Constitution, apply to the Office of the Ombudsman, seek judicial review or bring a civil case.

25. **Ms. Schulz** said that she wished to be clear: as she understood it a female employee in the private sector had no redress against her employer under the constitutional provisions on prohibition of discrimination. Was that correct?

26. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that section 16 of the Constitution referred only to the public sector. Private-sector employees were covered by the Equal Opportunities Act. They could also complain to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Training or the Industrial Court.

27. **Ms. Rana** said that she would like to know what rank and decision-making authority the head of the Gender Unit in the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare had. She would welcome some information on the human and financial resources allocated to the Ministry and to the Gender Unit. She asked whether there were gender focal points in all ministries and what mechanisms were in place for collaboration between the Gender Unit and the gender focal points. What was the difference between the Gender Focal Points and the Gender Cells set up by the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming and where were the gender cells located?

28. She would appreciate more information about the composition of the Women Empowerment Centres. She would also be interested to know more about the National Women's Council: were its members independent experts, was the recruiting process

transparent, and were there any plans to make the Council an autonomous body? Similarly, she would welcome information about the composition of the Equal Opportunities Commission and its recruitment procedure. Lastly, she said that she would appreciate receiving details of the "various partners" referred to in the report in connection with the national machinery for the advancement of women.

29. **Ms. Haidar** said that she wished to recall that the purpose of temporary special measures under article 4 (1) of the Convention was to help States parties to move from de jure to de facto gender equality. She noted that the Equal Opportunities Act, although it reproduced large sections of the Sex Discrimination Act, had dropped the provision on the adoption of temporary special measures. She would like to know whether the Gender Equality Bill would restore that provision. She also wondered what efforts would be made to increase the understanding of temporary special measures in the State party. Were there any plans to apply temporary special measures to areas such as education and employment as a means of addressing vertical segregation, notably for women from vulnerable groups who were subject to intersectional discrimination?

30. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the gender focal points had been introduced in 2017 in five ministries as a pilot project. Given their success, the Prime Minister had agreed to provide budget resources to allow them to be set up in all ministries. They provided the ministries with technical assistance in implementing the provisions on gender equality.

31. The partners referred to in the report were a mixture, drawn from the private sector — banks and companies, for example — and civil society.

32. Temporary special measures were a tricky area as, despite the constitutional provisions on gender equality, the law did not permit positive discrimination. Her delegation would take due note of the Committee's comments and look into ways of using temporary special measures to complement measures already in place.

33. **Mr. Appadoo** (Mauritius) said that the head of the Gender Unit had the same rank as other heads of unit in the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. The National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming comprised various ministry gender focal points, bringing them together in regular meetings chaired by the Minister of Gender Equality, at which the gender focal points reported on the action taken to implement sectoral gender policies and mainstreaming strategies.

34. The National Gender Policy Framework of 2008 was currently being revised with the aid of a consultant. Consultations were being held with stakeholders in order to make the Framework more responsive and to bring it into line with the Sustainable Development Goals. There were gender cells in each ministry, comprising senior administrators and the chairs of gender focal points.

35. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare and the Parliamentary Gender Caucus had carried out an evaluation of the national gender machinery in 2013. The mandate of the national gender machinery was very broad, technical capacity for gender mainstreaming was lacking and resources were not available to provide for additional staff, regular capacity-building and training. The European Union had provided assistance, but more was required. New legislation had clarified the role of the National Women's Council. Women's centres were spread around the island and were under the purview of the Council. Efforts were being made to make the centres more dynamic and the women's associations more attractive to young women.

36. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the allocation of budget resources to each ministry for gender policies increased annually. Where resources for a particular project were insufficient, additional funds were available on application.

37. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that the Equal Opportunities Commission was composed of a Chair and three other members. The Chair must have at least 10 years' experience as a judge, a magistrate or a law practitioner. One of the three members must have at least five years' experience as a law practitioner, while the other two members must have experience in the field of law, employment, industrial relations, sociology or

administration. The members were appointed by the President on advice from the Prime Minister following consultations with the leader of the opposition.

38. **Ms. Rana** said that she wished to know whether the State party envisaged elaborating a comprehensive national action plan for the advancement of women.

39. **Ms. Haidar** said that the persistence of gender stereotypes in Mauritius called for the implementation of temporary special measures. Such measures did not disrupt the balance established by the Constitution, since they were limited in time; they were not a form of charity but rather of entitlement for women.

40. **Ms. Chalal** asked whether Rodrigues Island was represented on the four regional committees affiliated to the National Women's Council.

41. **Mr. Appadoo** (Mauritius) said that the Government recognized the need for a comprehensive action plan for the advancement of women and would address that objective under the review of the National Gender Policy Framework. Legislation had been passed in 2016 to repeal the National Women's Council Act of 1985 and to provide a framework to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. The board of the Council was elected by different regional associations, conferring a high degree of autonomy on its members. Rodrigues also had an association and elected a representative to sit on the Council.

42. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the Government would consider the Committee's suggestion regarding temporary special measures.

43. **Ms. Acar** asked whether the Government intended to evaluate measures it had introduced to eliminate stereotypical attitudes and to combat violence against women, which appeared ineffective in the face of entrenched social norms that tolerated domestic violence in the State party. If so, could the Government provide a timeline for such an evaluation? She asked whether the Government would consider extending the scope of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act to cover not only persons of the opposite sex but also other partners and not only physical, emotional and sexual violence but also economic abuse. It was the victims of domestic violence rather than the perpetrators who had to leave their homes after obtaining a protection order. She asked whether the Government would introduce a victim-sensitive system under which the victim was protected in the comfort of her home.

44. Moreover, victims of abuse who turned to the police were faced with attempts to reconcile the woman and her abusive spouse, thereby putting her at risk of further domestic violence. That practice was contrary to the Committee's general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19. She would like to know how the Government was addressing the urgent matter of women being killed while under protection.

45. She also wished to know whether it would increase the number of shelters and ensure that they were accessible. Was the Government planning to withdraw the partial support it provided to the current shelters, leaving them funded solely by civil society organizations and the private sector, and what impact would such withdrawal have? Stays in shelters were limited in time. She asked what happened when domestic violence victims had reached that time limit. It was not clear whether the women were expected to return home or were supported through counselling, income-generating activities and skills development training for their overall empowerment.

46. She would like to know what percentage of the national budget was allocated to combating gender-based violence against women. The incidence of domestic violence had increased recently, while reporting of such violence, and prosecution of reported cases, had declined. She would welcome the Government's comments on that situation and on its proposals for protection and prosecution in all cases of domestic violence. Noting that the Government intended to study the accuracy of the police classification of domestic violence offences, she asked whether the police was skewing the statistics by recording those offences as assault or aggravated assault. When did the Government intend to introduce laws expressly criminalizing marital rape and corporal punishment?

47. **Ms. Gabr** asked what difficulties the Government had encountered in the application of the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009. She said that she would like to know whether the State party had adopted the "4P" approach to combating trafficking, involving protection, prevention, prosecution and partnership. She would appreciate further information on the mandate, composition and resources of the Interministerial Committee on Trafficking in Persons. It was not clear whether it was a standing or an ad hoc committee. What were the central features of the national action plan on trafficking in persons and which body would be responsible for its implementation? She wished to know if the action plan would include the establishment of shelters, as foreseen under the Act of 2009, and measures for the rehabilitation of victims. She wondered whether Mauritian law covered migrant workers in the construction industry and if not, why not. No victims had applied for compensation under the Act, as the process was slow and cumbersome. She would like to hear the delegation's comments on that issue.

48. The Committee would be grateful for further information on the extent of female prostitution. She wondered why prostitutes were subject to penalties while clients went unpunished. She asked whether the Government had measures in place to protect the children of prostitutes, who were easily targeted by traffickers; whether there were programmes to help prostitutes wishing to leave prostitution; and whether the State party, as a transit country, was considering entering into regional or bilateral agreements to end prostitution.

49. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that there was at present no system in place to analyse the effectiveness of the measures taken to combat domestic violence. All three shelters in Mauritius were run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with additional funding from the Government. Support was given to domestic violence victims in the shelters to help them return to society. Where a victim who had filed charges was unable to return home, the victim could apply for an occupation order. The victim's welfare and safety and the best interests of the child were always given priority. The Interministerial Committee on Trafficking in Persons was a standing committee.

50. **Mr. Appadoo** (Mauritius) said that resources were devoted to the implementation of the activities put in place by the Government to eliminate discrimination against women, and that scant capacity remained for evaluation mechanisms. There was a domestic violence information system installed at the family support bureaux, and a separate system under which the police recorded cases reported to them. Attempts to bring the two systems together to give a full picture had not yet borne fruit. Mauritius would welcome the assistance of the Committee in the field of data-collection and monitoring. Support was given to women victims to help them return to society, and participatory needs assessments had recently been conducted to determine their precise needs. However, the scale of those initiatives was inadequate and efforts must be made to enable women to achieve economic independence so as to avoid returning to a violent relationship.

51. The Government had adopted a protection, prevention, prosecution and partnership approach to combating the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and a coordination mechanism had been established to enable the Ministry of Gender to collaborate with other ministries. A shelter for child victims was in place and provided care and support for integration into society, in cooperation with NGOs.

52. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that marital rape was criminalized under the Criminal Code. The Protection from Domestic Violence Act had been amended in 2016 to include any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse or the other person had the right to abstain. However, the Government was currently examining the question of marital rape in the wider context of a general review of sexual offences. Corporal punishment was prohibited in Mauritius, and the Ministry sent a circular reminder to schools at the start of each term. Programmes on the Convention on the Rights of the Child were carried out in schools. Immediate action was taken if cases of corporal punishment were reported to the authorities. The Government was also reaching out to families, especially in rural areas, encouraging them to use dialogue and communication in place of corporal punishment.

53. **Ms. Acar** said that an express law on marital rape would send a clear message to society. She also would like an answer to her question concerning the percentage of the national budget allocated to the prevention of violence against women.

54. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would be grateful for a reply to her question about the Interministerial Committee and the national action plan on trafficking in persons. Did the Government envisage regional and bilateral cooperation on efforts to end prostitution?

55. **Ms. Chalal** said that a law expressly prohibiting corporal punishment should be enacted.

56. **Ms. Schulz** said she would welcome clarification with regard to the remarks made by the Chair of the Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy on the release of a man convicted of rape by a Mauritian court. Once freed, the man had committed another violent crime. When questioned by journalists concerning the Commission's decision to grant the prisoner freedom, the Chair had answered that the Commission had not received full information on the case; he had then proceeded to cast doubt on the truth of the victim's claim that she had been raped. She asked whether the Government would take measures to ensure that the Commission would never again take a decision without full information, how it assessed the explanations given by the Chair of the Commission and whether it shared the opinion that the Chair's viewpoint exemplified a stereotypical attitude towards victims of sexual violence.

57. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that the decrease in prosecutions for domestic violence offences was partly due to victims' unwillingness to pursue cases once they had been brought before the courts. Perpetrators of domestic violence could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code as well as the Protection from Domestic Violence Act for offences such as assault.

58. There had been some difficulties in implementing the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act and, until recently, traffickers had been prosecuted under the Child Protection Act instead. Nonetheless, progress had been made and three court cases for trafficking offences under the Act were currently under way. The Interministerial Committee on Trafficking in Persons had been established by the Cabinet of Ministers in 2015, after Mauritius had been placed on the tier 2 watch list in the Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 of the United States Department of State. The Committee, chaired by the Attorney General, had brought together a number of stakeholders, including the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the police force and a number of government ministers, to take stock of the situation regarding human trafficking. The Ministry of Defence and local authorities in Rodrigues had been tasked with preparing a national plan of action for combating trafficking in persons, which would be published in the near future, covering issues such as the rehabilitation of victims and the provision of shelters. The Ministry was also in the process of preparing a leaflet entitled "Know Your Rights" to raise awareness among potential trafficking victims, especially migrant workers. The Government had refurbished a disused building in the area of Vacoas for use as a shelter for trafficking victims. The delegation had taken note of the expert's remarks concerning the regional and bilateral agreements in combating human trafficking and would transmit them to the relevant authorities. The Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy would decide on the appropriate action to be taken concerning the remarks made by its Chair. She was unable to comment further on the matter at the present time.

59. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the budget for the promotion of family welfare and addressing gender-based violence had seen a steady increase. Requests by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare for modest budget increases, to recruit more staff for implementation programmes, for example, were often accepted. NGOs that ran shelters for domestic violence victims were provided with capitation grants.

60. **Ms. Acar** said that it would be helpful, for both the Committee and the State party, to have concrete figures on the national budget allocations for combating gender-based violence.

61. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that figures would be transmitted to the Committee within the next 48 hours.

Articles 7 to 9

62. **Ms. Haidar** said that the representation of women in local government had dramatically increased owing to the requirement for parties to field a minimum of one third of candidates of either sex under the Local Government Act. However, women continued to be underrepresented in senior government positions and there had been a marked drop in the representation of women in the National Assembly in the period 2010–2018. She would like to know whether the Government would consider extending the quota system in place at the local level to the national level, for both the legislative and executive powers. Pointing out that the exclusion of women from key leadership positions had an adverse impact on achieving sustainable development and social justice, she wondered whether the Government would introduce effective measures to ensure equal representation of men and women in Government and public life and to promote the advancement of women to top positions in both the public and private sectors. She would be interested to learn whether the State party intended to tackle gender stereotypes by, for example, showcasing prominent female role models in politics and business. She would appreciate further information on the representation of women in the diplomatic service, particularly at the ambassador level. How many female ambassadors were there and what was the ratio of men to women? Lastly, she would be grateful for information on women's involvement in the Truth and Justice Commission established in 2009 to conduct inquiries into slavery and forced labour during the colonial period.

63. **Ms. Ameline** said that she commended the State party on its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the empowerment of women as tools to address the challenges facing the country, such as violence, poverty, inequality and climate change. She encouraged the State party to develop cross-cutting strategies and to forge partnerships with stakeholders in the public and private sectors, using the 2030 Agenda as a road map, in order to meet its obligations under the Convention. She would appreciate further details on the plans to use the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve gender parity across all levels of society.

64. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the number of women registered to vote had risen and women now accounted for more than half of the voting population, which highlighted the need to tackle the underrepresentation of women in Parliament. A ministerial report on electoral reform had been circulated in September 2018 examining various aspects of the electoral system and making proposals aimed at enhancing women's participation in Government. She hoped that the proposals would be brought before Parliament in the near future.

65. Many women held key positions in the public sector and occupied just under half of permanent and deputy permanent secretary posts. By contrast, few women served on boards of directors or as chief executive officers in the private sector. In response, the Government had introduced the new Code of Corporate Governance in 2017, which highlighted the importance of gender diversity on company boards. The Government was aware of the need to provide more incentives to private companies to boost women's participation.

66. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that a female ambassador occupied the post of Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and the High Commissioner in Australia and consul in Mumbai were women. Although male ambassadors outnumbered female ones, more than half of the officials in the diplomatic service as a whole were women. Furthermore, one of the senior commissioners of the Truth and Justice Commission was a woman.

67. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that the National Women's Council and the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming would be used as platforms to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

68. **Ms. Verges**, noting that legislation on nationality had been revised to give men and women the equal right to transmit their nationality through marriage, said that women nonetheless faced obstacles and delays in the administrative process that men did not. She would appreciate information on the current state of affairs in that regard. She would be interested to know what measures had been taken to accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

69. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that the Constitution guaranteed equal rights for married women and men in acquiring or changing their nationality. Marriage of a Mauritian woman to a non-national did not result in the woman losing her nationality and foreign husbands of Mauritian women were eligible to apply for citizenship.

70. **Ms. Chalal** said that, in 2015, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed concerns about reported cases of persons whose birth had not been declared owing to lack of communication and lengthy procedures regarding late registration, especially in the case of declaration after 45 days from birth (CRC/C/MUS/CO/3-5, para. 33). She would like to know what further measures the State party might take to ensure communication between the competent authorities and families to facilitate late registration and to speed up the procedures.

71. **Ms. Goordyal-Chittoo** (Mauritius) said that the tardy declaration procedure allowed births to be registered after the statutory 45-day period. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare was working with the Attorney General's Office to speed up the procedure.

72. **Ms. Jeewa-Daureeawoo** (Mauritius) said that hospitals informed parents of the legal requirement to register births within 45 days. Hospitals also provided leaflets containing further information on the registration process. Where the Ministry was notified of a birth that had not been registered, it endeavoured to contact either the child's parents or the hospital where the child had been born to ensure that the birth was registered.

Articles 10 to 14

73. **Ms. Chalal** said that, in spite of the commendable progress made on access to education, regional disparities continued to exist in terms of quality of teaching, literacy rates and infrastructure. According to alternative sources, there was only one secondary school in the Agalega Islands, located on the north island. Students living on the south island had to cross the sea by boat and often missed school due to bad weather. Since there were two primary schools — one in the north and one in the south — she would be interested to learn why such a disparity existed in terms of the level of education. Given that many children left school without being able to read or write, she wondered whether any mechanism was in place to assess the school system and whether any study comparing the quality of teaching on the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues.

74. Noting that absenteeism among girls increased from 13 per cent at primary school level to 17 at secondary school level, according to data from 2017, it would be useful to know what measures had been implemented to tackle the problem. She asked whether any study had been carried out to pinpoint its root causes and, if so, what conclusions had been drawn. While incentives had been introduced to encourage girls to pursue subjects relating to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), girls continued to be underrepresented in those areas. She wondered whether the State party might adopt temporary special measures such as offering more scholarships to girls who wished to study those fields. Given that boys outnumbered girls at university level, it would be helpful to have up-to-date information on the number of women in positions of responsibility in universities. She enquired whether the State party intended to take measures to ensure that migrant women and girls had access to education.

75. The country's sexual and reproductive health curriculum required strengthening at all levels of education, especially as the high rates of teenage pregnancy suggested that the existing programmes were not having the desired effect. She wished to know whether the State party planned to make sexual and reproductive health education mandatory with a view to preventing early pregnancies and to ensure that teachers were well trained in that area. Although the law did not prohibit girls from returning to school after giving birth, they were often discouraged for fear of stigmatization. She would be interested to hear what incentives the Government could introduce to encourage those girls to return to school and complete their studies. She asked whether the Government would improve sanitation facilities by, for example, ensuring separate toilet facilities for boys and girls in all schools.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.